

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:**March 23, 1998**

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LAST WEEK:

HOUSE FY99 APPROPRIATIONS - On Tuesday, the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Subcommittee (Chairman Joe Skeen, R-NM) of the House Appropriations Committee held a hearing on NRCS appropriations for FY99. Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, Jim Lyons, and Chief of NRCS, Pearlie Reed provided testimony to the Subcommittee on the President's FY 1999 budget request. Chief Reed stated that his goal is to focus on assistance and program delivery to the field. He stated that he aims to reduce the bureaucratic burden on customers and employees to allow for increased time spent providing direct technical assistance. The Committee asked a multitude of questions on a broad array of topics including: program accountability; the American Heritage Rivers Program; Clean Water Action activities, loss of farmland to development, and the general health of our resources.

Chairman Skeen said that he would like to see more emphasis placed upon field level conservation activities. He stated that we need to get field staff "out from behind desks". Ranking Member, Marcy Kaptur (D-OH) complimented the agency for its accomplishments. She also asked what the impact of proposed user fees would be on the agency. Rep. Jose Serrano (D-NY) expressed strong support for the agency's participation in the Urban Resources Partnership. Tom Latham (R-IA) said that he would like to see NRCS in charge of regulating large livestock operations. He said that farmers needed to have one agency that was in charge of the issue, so that it would be clear what standards and regulations are required. He cited wetlands as an area that has caused many producers confusion in the past.

EMERGENCY SUPPLEMENTAL CLEARS SENATE COMMITTEE -

By a vote of 26-2, the Senate Appropriations Committee passed S. 1768, Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for FY 1998. The bill contains \$50 million for the Emergency Watershed Program (EWP), with \$10 million designated specifically for recovery efforts in Georgia. The bill also contains \$60 million for the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), with \$4.48 specifically earmarked to assist maple syrup producers in VT and NY, who were impacted by ice storms earlier this year. The Senate Committee was not required to offset the spending contained in the bill. The legislation now goes to the Senate floor for consideration.

Meanwhile, the House Appropriations Committee will take up similar legislation on March 24th. House leadership has instructed appropriators to offset spending with cuts in FY 1998 programs.

BRIEFING ON ANIMAL WASTE - Fee Busby of NRCS and EPA staff briefed the Water Resources Subcommittee of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee on Friday on the issue of Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs). EPA outlined many aspects of the President's Clean Water Action Plan, and also the proposed strategy for regulating CAFOs under the Clean Water Act, which was announced on March 5, 1998. Congressional staff focused mostly on the process through which the final strategy will be developed. Staff also raised questions regarding the number of CAFOs which are estimated to exist, and also asked how long agricultural producers would have to implement plans. The NRCS and EPA representatives articulated the process through which many of the questions would be answered in coming months.

FARMLAND PROTECTION PROGRAM(FPP) - A Federal Register notice dated March 20, 1998, announced the request for FY 1998 proposals. NRCS is announcing the availability of up to \$17.28 million for proposals from States, Tribes, and units of local government to cooperate in the acquisition of conservation easements or other productive soil that is subject to a pending offer from a State, Tribal or local government for the purpose of limiting conversion to nonagricultural uses of that land. Selection will be based on the FPP criteria established in the notice. Proposals for participation must be received by June 18, 1998.

LEGISLATION OF NOTE -

BILL	MEMBER	PURPOSE
S. 1768	Stevens (AK)	Making Emergency Supplemental Appropriations for Fiscal Year 1998.
S. 1774	Lott/Cochran (MS)	To authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to make guaranteed farm ownership loans and guaranteed farm operating loans of up to \$600,000, and to increase the maximum loan amounts with inflation.
S. 1762	Baucus (MT)	To amend the Agricultural Market Transition Act to authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to extend the term of marketing assistance loans.
H. R. 3513	Clayton (NC)	To reform agricultural credit programs of the Department of Agriculture.

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THIS WEEK:**HOUSE EMERGENCY SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS MARK-UP -**

The House Appropriations Committee (Chairman Livingston, R-Louisiana) will mark up the House measure for recovery from natural disasters for FY98.

March 24 9:30 a.m. 2359 Rayburn Bldg.

DISASTER ASSISTANCE - The Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee (Chairman Sherwood Boehlert, R-New York) of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee will hold a hearing on the federal costs of disaster assistance.

March 26 10:00 a.m. 2167 Rayburn Bldg.
Witnesses TBA

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LOOKING AHEAD:

WATER SUPPLY AND QUALITY IN NORTH DAKOTA - The Water and Power Subcommittee (Chairman Jon Kyl, R-Arizona) of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee will hold a hearing on pending legislation.

March 31 2:30 p.m. 366 Dirksen Bldg.
Witnesses TBA

HOUSE INTERIOR FY99 APPROPRIATIONS HEARINGS - The Interior Subcommittee (Chairman Regula, R-Ohio) of the House Appropriations Committee will hold hearings on FY99 appropriations for programs under its jurisdiction. Hearings of potential interest to NRCS include:

April 1 Members of Congress

MANAGEMENT OF ANIMAL WASTE - The Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee (Chairman Richard Lugar, R-Indiana) will hold a hearing on legislation, H.R. 1323, that would change national standards governing the management of animal waste.

April 2 9:00 a.m. 328-Russell Bldg.
Witnesses TBA

USDA YEAR 2000 COMPLIANCE - The Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee (Chairman Richard Lugar, R-Indiana) will hold a hearing to review USDA's information technology systems to ensure year 2000 compliance.

May 14 9:00 a.m. 328A Russell Bldg.
Witnesses TBA

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